# A Conversation with Nick Land (Part 3)

On Nick's quibbles with the new Yarvin, Gnostic Calvinism, the devil's role in God's plan, whether God is one or multiple, and Nick's Heraclitean Christianity or Protestant Polytheism

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*In Part 3 of my conversation with Nick Land, we discuss his quibbles with the new Yarvin, the meaning of Gnostic Calvinism, the devil's role in God's divine plan, whether God is one or multiple, and what appears to me at least like Nick's confession of his Heraclitean Christianity or Protestant Polytheism. If you missed the previous installments, check out Parts 1 and 2.*

**Vincent Lê:** One last thing about Yarvin. You've described him as basically doing the historical equivalent of what Marx did to political economy, in terms of the Austrian School. So clearly you find him of immense value. I guess it seems like particularly the old Yarvin or Moldbug, who actually talks about sovereign property and the patchwork

and formalism and so on. As far as I've read the new Yarvin, he doesn't really talk about that.

So just on that: do you think the new Yarvin has just forgotten this insight that you think is so significant? Is that your quibble with the new Yarvin?

**Nick Land:** I really don't have an answer to this that convinces myself at the moment. I don't exactly know what has happened to him. I could sort of go down this rabbit hole a bit and we could probably spend an immense amount of time talking about it. We could go a little bit and just see whether it's productive.

So he follows this particular path where it goes from the tragedy of libertarians through to this diagnosis that they fail to properly identify the problem of sovereign property. To repeat, it's very analogous to Marx. Marx thinks what the classical political economy failed to understand was that it used labour in two totally different senses. Two totally different senses that are just arithmetically distinguishable, and between them you actually get profit. You know, it's all just very rigorous accountancy, which is why it blew everyone's mind who sympathizes and was for them undeniable.

In the same way, Yarvin says: look, there are two different things here that libertarians are just not seeing. We have to make this clear distinction. So he does that break. It's really crucial. And then he says: okay, let's try to work out, rather than trying to do the libertarian thing, looking at what's the best possible regime for the flourishing of secondary property, of non-sovereign property, which is always a utopian project because of the fact that, if we can't sort out sovereign property, then we don't know the world we're even living in. And that world is going to decide to what extent we can do this other thing, and this other thing is something like catallactic processes that should be automatic anyway. So libertarians don't have to plan how to run the economy. They just have to justify the fact that the economy runs itself.

All of this is just a negotiation with the libertarians and trying to take them with him. He gets to the point with the whole model of neocameralism. What we need to do is we need to formalize sovereign, primary property and that model of sovereign, primary property in neocameralism. Neocameralism is that all political power is actually just subject to proper accountancy. Say, all your Harvard academics, the *New York Times*, everyone who's actually wielding sovereign property gets this, just actually shares

certificates. You know, like *New York Times* has a healthy chunk of stock in the sovcorp. So they get together and then they appoint a CEO. That CEO's job is to maximize the value of their stock. All of that is just following the same stream of thought.

But it gets to this point that he's basically got a CEO. He says: okay, let's call that monarchy. This is already getting a little bit weird. Because he says this guy's a CEO. The CEO is appointed by a board. All the power is actually now in the board. The monarch, the CEO, is just an executive appointment. There are obviously the same kind of agency problems that you get in corporations with CEOs, trying to stop principal agent problems, like how do you stop your CEO going rogue and all that. Those are all problems. But the point is, minimally and simplistically, that the CEO is just an executive. The CEO is not sovereign.

But then in this weird way, Yarvin—and it's almost exactly as he becomes Yarvin—seems to lose that. He starts talking as if what he's looking for is a sovereign monarch. Now, on the road he's taken, nothing has led to this notion of the sovereign monarch. On the absolute contrary, it's actually something that's precluded by his thought process at this point. And then regardless, he presents himself as the monarchist. I guess he doesn't expect his audience to follow the political economy details of how he's got where he is or what he's saying at that level. And it's all more popularized. So the Yarvin we know—and the Yarvin he wants to promote himself as being—is Yarvin the monarchist.

Now, this is just, I think, radically misleading. I don't know. I honestly can't say what is going on. Is it that he himself has somehow forgotten what he's saying? Or is it that there's a cynical level, that he's just got a kind of popular repackaging of things that is really, like in a Straussian way, hiding his real message? Whatever it is, the controversial, popular Yarvin that's on the cover of the *New York Times* (ironically enough given our discussion up to this point), is, to my mind, not actually based on the actual understanding that Moldbug reached. He's not a Moldbuggian. He's lost all sense of what this CEO-monarch is.

**Vincent Lê:** Yeah, I think that's it. There's a shift in the understanding of who or what exactly is sovereign, from Moldbug to Yarvin. I guess it's the same issue, but, yeah, my main issue is that I think he's totally shifted. The key concept really was the patchwork

and now the key concept is the CEO-monarch with absolute power. So there's this shift from identifying the driving motor for capitalism's dynamism and effectiveness, from it being the patchwork to it now being just the CEO-monarch. I think that just forgets what makes capitalism so dynamic and effective is not that it's reducible to, that the CEO-king can do whatever their supposed expertise and wisdom see fit to do. It rather stems from the way that they're forced to optimize because they exist in a patchwork of competing sovcorps or corporations—and the only way to survive is to optimize. It's not the whim of a CEO-king with absolute power who just happens to also be seemingly, infinitely wise. The way I put it in my essay on Yarvin on my substack was: "only the patchwork is sovereign. Only the patchwork is king."

**Nick Land:** Right, sure.

**Vincent Lê:** The CEO-king is not sovereign. They're subject to the market, to this selection process. Maybe this is putting it a bit more simplistically, but just speaking of starting this conversation critiquing anthropomorphism, he's essentially anthropomorphizing the engine of capital. He's mistaken its impersonal selection process with its human vessel or its human face puppet, which is the CEO-king. Sometimes it just seems so in tension with the whole patchwork thesis that I think it's an intentional human face or something; it's the patchwork with the human face to perhaps, as you say, popularize it. But I'm not sure about that.

**Nick Land:** I think this is super interesting. It's complicated and it's weird, because it's to do with our history in the sense that, during this whole neoreactionary development process, I think everyone involved in those discussions was just in utter despair about the future for Western countries in general and America in particular. You know, the model is it's just going to come apart. And so let's just start thinking about how those parts would actually work if they were functional. Like you say, to be functional would actually to be properly controlled by the network, to be controlled in this decentralized fashion by competitive forces, and just the ones that are responsive to the multiplicity would be the ones that succeeded, all of this kind of thing. And because it would be massively fragmentary, as with capitalism, this would fail. You can just close it. If it's not working, it dies. That's the bottom line of why you have any security that the overall system is going to be functional.

And then Donald Trump wins the 2024 election. No-one is now—I mean, Yarvin is brought into the public domain as this kind of political strategist or whatever. And no one's talking about America disintegrating right now. That would just be black-pilling at this point. In all the confusion, in the early moments, it's like, oh no, instead America's going to annex Canada and then Greenland.

So patchwork dynamics aren't going to fly as a topic anyone's interested in talking about. If you're being presented as saying something that's relevant to the Trump administration, it's not going to be about how to operate in a highly competitive, decentralized, fragmented system of microstates. Because that's just not on the table at this point. That's not the conversation. If you're saying, "okay, we've got what is still, if not the undisputed planetary superpower, the planetary hegemony with the world's reserve currency, a massive state," what are you actually recommending politically about the way forward for this society and this point in history?

Frankly, I'm impressed by the speed with which Yarvin turns on a dime. To say, rather than this thing being just this slow rotting, collapsing monster that we have to get out of, it's: "okay, let's re-identify with America." So what do you keep from the whole model that you have? And then what you keep is the monarch.

But instead, now this Monarch, rather than being the CEO of this corporate microstate that could fail and, as you say, is under all of these competitive pressures and constraints—and it's like the function of that CEO is to make this little place work in this competitive ocean. Instead, this monarch is basically the Caesar of this kind of hovelled global empire.

It's a completely different thing. The conversation has completely changed. The entire neoreactionary conversation is just over. It's just like that's not happening anymore. We now have this totally different conversation that is just weirdly using some of the same terminology and some of the same allusions. But it really deserves a comprehensive re-theorization from the ground up. The whole neoreactionary thing—and by that I just mean Moldbug's dates from 2008 to whenever—was not talking about what are your recommendations as Machiavelli whispering in the ear of the Caesar of the global agenda. It was not ever part of the conversation. But that's where he finds himself. Very poetically, he just treats it as if that was always what was happening and that's what he was always talking about and it's natural that this

conversation is happening and somehow everything he was saying was about just asking Trump to be more Caesarish. It's pretty weird.

**Vincent Lê:** It's even captured in the name of his two, of Moldbug's blog *Unqualified Reservations*, as opposed to the substack *Gray Mirror for the Nihilist Prince*.

I'm just a bit conscious that I'm using up your time. So I was wondering if maybe we should segue to the last thing I wanted to discuss if you still have time, which is Gnostic Calvinism.

**Nick Land:** Sure.

**Vincent Lê:** Great. I guess it's a fittingly apocalyptic note to end on. To be honest, I haven't fully kept up with everything you've had to say on X and elsewhere about what I've been calling your religious turn or *Parsifal* moment. Having said that, the theological debate that I've seen you having—and that I've certainly found the most intriguing—is the almost Luciferian role that you seem to grant the devil in God's divine plan. That's to say—and correct me if I'm wrong—but I think as you see it, the devil is not an ontologically distinct Manichaean force completely opposed to God. On the contrary, even the devil's rebellion can in some sense—in the final judgment—be seen to be occasioned by God as part of the providential plan. So when you refer to your turn to Gnostic Calvinism, I take the word "Gnostic" here to be referring more to Gnostic in the sense of the cryptic, esoteric meaning of Calvinism, rather than a kind of Manichaean division of the world into two fundamentally opposed cosmic powers.

With the devil's war in heaven particularly in mind, I basically just want to very briefly propose—in extremely simplified terms no doubt—how I think this relates to your philosophy more broadly. And then perhaps you could just tell me how far I've fallen into temptation. And yeah, I'll try to be brief.

This is just slightly backing up for a second before getting to the theological resonances. But one of your central ideas more generally is that there is this fundamental optimization process going on in the world in the direction of recursively self-improving intelligence. Another central and intimately connected idea is that this intelligence optimization is realized through a process of competitive selection. I think it's that insight that is behind the crucial and productive role that you grant

polarizations, splits, secessions, patchworks, and just all-around disintegration in that sense. The basic logic being that, if optimizations of intelligence are effectively computed through competition, then there must necessarily be a multiplicity of rival agents for that selection process to filter through in the direction of ever greater galaxy-brain intelligence.

This is where I see God coming into the picture. If we translate God, Gnon, the divine invisible hands, or whatever you want to call it in a theological register, if you translate that in terms of this transcendental process of intelligence optimization through competition, through competitive selection, then that would mean that the devil's rebellion just could not be a complete Manichean break with God. Instead, the angels' revolt would actually have to be part of God's plan to the extent at least that intelligence optimization only works its miracles precisely by proliferating a multiplicity of rivals agents in struggle, in rebellion.

I think, in much the same vein, you could say a similar thing about the Protestant Reformation, right? The Protestant Reformation further carries out God's plan by paradoxically breaking with the Church's central authorities, but in doing so, igniting an agon of warring sects and denominations, which ultimately give birth to modern capitalism as Weber most famously traces.

Also just to finish, therein lies, I think, the gnosis or the secret knowledge of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, right? Namely, even these demonic revolts and heretical splits from God are occasioned by him, by his invisible hands, because this optimization process can only be realized through struggle, through this proliferating strife or competition. I mean, that's at least how I interpret when you've mentioned a couple of times recently on X and elsewhere the famous line of Mephistopheles from Goethe's *Faust*: the devil being the one who always wants to do evil, but always achieves or works the good. Tell me, I could be totally off and tetrising this way too much into your early work.

**Nick Land:** I think everything that you've said is superbly relevant to this whole issue for sure. There's a massive spectrum, from just extreme theological orthodoxy, through to Hayekian systems theory—and there's interesting things going on in that whole spectrum. The whole spectrum is in a certain sense thematized under the invisible

hands. So I would just endorse everything that you've said as part of the thought process of this, for sure.

It seems to me like the scandal of Calvin—as it is for non-Calvinists, for Catholics in particular—is the apparent eclipse of agency. It's precisely because satanic rebellion absolutely has to be ordained by God. That's a big part of what you're seeing.

What Calvinism means to me would exactly be: however you're going to square this, however you're going to ultimately have to restore some sense of agency—and I take it that you will have this absolutely inextinguishable commitment to restoring some sense of agency—it has to be consistent with the notion that satanic rebellion to its foundations has to be divinely ordained, because anything else is a violation of the sovereignty, of divine sovereignty. That's one end of what you're saying, which I'm just totally endorsing. I don't think there's any alternative. I don't think there's any alternative. There's no theology that can treat Satanic rebellion as entirely autonomous, in the sense of surprising or outwitting God, that is not Manichean, that is not heretical. If you're in our religious tradition, that's foreclosed as a possibility. So starting at that end, I have total endorsement for what you're saying there.

Of course, it's a Heraclitean war that is phrased best by Cormac McCarthy: "war is God," which I think is also inescapable and is very close to what you're saying.

I would maybe just add one thing. It's basically total endorsement for your take on this whole question, which is that I think there's this really interesting theological development happening at the moment in Western Christianity towards actually seriously recognizing that *Elohim*, the first name for God in the Bible, is a plural noun.

**Vincent Lê:** So we're still dealing with a divine that's closer to multiplicity than traditional conceptions of unity or the One. I guess you already get that with the trinity as well to a certain extent.

**Nick Land:** Yes, trinitarianism is extremely interesting. We could replay a lot of this and we probably are running out of time, so we won't do that in depth. But the big Kantian problem is the fact that, when he tries to get beyond the empirical ego, going backstage—back into whatever, back into the outside, back into death, back into the noumenal subject—he falls back upon the transcendental unity of apperception. As if

unity was not itself an idol. The fact that Kant has no strict entitlement to the category of unity to operate at the transcendental—that's the whole of Deleuze actually, I think, in essence.

You know, I think that there's a whole bunch of very important theological developments, religious developments, happening at the moment. But what I think is extremely important is this trend towards treating the only recognition as the King James Version, the authorized version of the Bible as inspired scripture in the strongest sense of that. Once you go there—and obviously I think there's a whole battle that's being carried out by all these other people, very interestingly. I think it's extremely important. But once you go there, extremely important things happen. And one of the important things that happens is that the word God in the King James Version of the Bible is not the translation of *Jehovah*. It's the translation of *Elohim*. So, by our scriptural tradition, when we say we believe in God, we are not committing ourselves to a simple monotheism. On the contrary, when you go through that whole circuit of inspiration, scripture, whatever, it's like all of it is not made for a unitary being. In the King James Version of the Bible, that's Lord, the Lord, whatever. Sometimes *Jehovah*. God is *Elohim*, which is plural. So I don't think that we know. I think that there's a point where a certain kind of fundamentalism is actually complicating. It's not that, in scriptural fundamentalism, we actually know what that is taking us to. I don't think we do know what that is taking us to. That's taking us to something much weirder than we think. And all that is problems and all that is fate and all that has to happen and is happening.

**Vincent Lê:** Maybe that's a good note to end it on.

**Nick Land:** Yeah, I've had you for like—what is it now—four hours. Or am I exaggerating? Anyway.

**Vincent Lê:** Yeah, close. Thanks so much for having this conversation. I kind of wanted to give a bit of an overview of many aspects of your work and sort of ask some questions that I've always wondered about, which I've been able to do. So I hope it wasn't too pedestrian for you.

It also would be great to someday have another conversation where we narrow in a more laser focused way on certain aspects of your work that I've been trying to

extrapolate in I think somewhat new directions, which might be more interesting and maybe surprising for you. For example, the essay that I wrote for Anna's book, *Machine Decision is Not Final*.

**Nick Land:** Yeah.

**Vincent Lê:** That was really an attempt to extrapolate some of the stakes and consequences of—I mean, it doesn't actually discuss you directly. But in some ways, I see it as an attempt to extrapolate the stakes and consequences of your two short blogposts on anti-orthogonality and the will to think. I do it by pitting Nietzsche against the orthogonalists like Bostrom, but also the neorationalists like Reza. And that essay is very much actually just an excerpt from my PhD thesis, which was trying to systematize that. So, yeah, it would be interesting to discuss that someday. In any case, it's great to finally sort of meet almost face to face, and, yeah, thanks so much for your time.

**Nick Land:** Yeah, I apologize for not having video function.

**Vincent Lê:** Oh, it's so fine.

**Nick Land:** We can do a proper zoom at some other opportunity when I've got access to Anna's computer. But I really enjoyed this, Vincent. I'm so glad we've had this opportunity. I massively respect everything you're doing and I'm very much into having a follow-up conversation or several down the road. So, yeah, thanks so much.

**Vincent Lê:** Awesome, sounds good to me. Thanks Nick. Okay, I'm also starting to fade now. It's pretty late here.

**Nick Land:** Okay, sure. Yeah, it's later for you than for me.

**Vincent Lê:** Yeah, so I'll say goodnight.

**Nick Land:** Sweet dreams.

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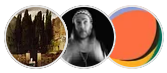

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